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AFT, AFL-CIO

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## TESTIMONY

SHARON M. PALMER

### PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

February 23, 2009

Good afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Sharkey and members of the Committee. I am Sharon Palmer, President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse 28,000 member union representing professionals in both the public and private sectors.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to appear before you. Today I will remark briefly on several of the bills before you.

Bill 5526 – Everyone agrees that whenever possible, suspended students should have an in-school program. The problem is we don't have the space or the money to run a program. We believe the legislature would be wise to postpone implementation of the new law.

Various Mandate Bills – Please look carefully at all of these. Anything can be called a mandate. The "M" word has a very negative connotation these days. Most of them are there for good reason. It is financial concerns which bring the mandate issues to the forefront, rather than the merits of the mandate. We hope you put tax reform ahead of mandate reform.



Bill 6388 – The Governor's bill essentially makes binding arbitration a useless process from a labor perspective. We currently have non-binding arbitration, which is unequal to start. The Governor's bill would suspend arbitration for two years, limit the scope of bargaining and change the factors considered in an arbitration decision. We ask for a fair and balanced process. This bill is not it.

Bill 6389 – We support incentives for regionalization. It is an idea which everyone talks about, but little is done. Perhaps the combination of tough economic times and financial incentives will bring communities together. Let's hope ... this is Connecticut.

AFT Connecticut stands ready to work with you on any of these issues. We fully understand your constraints in these times and know that the work before you will be very difficult.

Thank you again for your time.